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ABSTRACT

The present research examined possible sex differences in the relative strengths of the norms of equity and equality as determinants of reward distribution behavior. The subjects of the study were 72 male and 78 female undergraduate students. It was predicted that females would be more concerned with equality than males. Results supported the hypothesis since males divided money equally with a co-worker with equal inputs only when the total amount of reward was congruent with an internal standard of equitable pay; when reward level exceeded this amount, they gave more than 50% to themselves. Females, however, always divided the reward equally. (Author/LAA)

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by

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# A Sex Difference in the Distribution of Oversufficient Rewards[1]

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In recent years, there seems to have been an increase in concern--both within and outside of the scientific community--about the consequences of differences in the traditional sex roles. For example, Mednick and Tangri (1972), in a comprehensive examination of this issue, advance the argument that one consequence of sex role differences is the development of the conception that direct monetary compensation for work is less appropriate for women than it is for men. The present research examines an implication of Mednick and Tangri's (1972) position by exploring the possibility that there is a sex difference in the salience of two social norms--the norm of equity and the norm of equality--that potentially mediate satisfaction with the distribution of rewards.

Stated briefly, the norm of equity prescribes that the ratio of a person's inputs (i.e., perceived contributions) to outcomes (i.e., rewards or profits) should be equal to the ratios of relevant other people ("comparison equity") and/or congruent with an "internal standard" which is the product of his (her) past experience ("own-other equity"). A number of studies--most of which are summarized by Goodman and Friedman (1971) and Walster, Berscheid, and Walster (1973)--have demonstrated that the equity norm is an important standard by which people judge the "appropriateness" of a given allocation of rewards. Of most relevance to the present research are two studies which suggest that females might employ the norm less than do males, especially when they are judging the adequacy of their own pay. Leventhal and Lane (1970) found that males tended to behave equitably when distributing rewards

to themselves and a coworker who had either higher or lower inputs; that is, they gave more than 50% of the reward to themselves when their inputs were greater than the coworker's and less than 50% when their inputs were inferior. Females, on the other hand, also gave themselves less than 50% when their inputs were inferior, but they allocated only 50% to themselves when they had superior inputs. Messe' and Lichtman (1972), in a somewhat more complicated study, found essentially the same pattern of results. Thus, it appears that females do not follow the equity norm when it is in their best interest (economically) to do so.

In contrast to equity, the norm of equality prescribes that all persons should receive an equal reward, no matter the circumstances. There is some evidence that females subscribe to the norm of equality more than do males. Lane and Messe' (1971) demonstrated that when inputs are equal (i.e., when comparison equity and equality are congruent) women tend to divide rewards equally more than do men. Benton (1971) found that when bargaining with friends or strangers preadolescent females were more likely than males to prefer an equal division of rewards, irrespective of differences in inputs. Schmitt and Marwell (1972) reported that females are more likely than males to attempt to generate an equal allocation of rewards under conditions in which equality lowers the total amount of reward.

The present study examined the relative strength of the equity and equality norms in males and females from a somewhat different perspective than that of Leventhal and Lane (1970) or Messe' and Lichtman (1972). In these studies, the salience of equality was compared to that of

comparison equity, since subjects could reward themselves and the co-workers as a function of differences in inputs, or they could ignore these differences and divide pay equally. In the present research, the salience of equality was compared to that of own-other equity.

Lane and Messe' (1972) demonstrated that males tend to give themselves 50% of the reward when they and a coworker have equal inputs and the total amount of pay is sufficient to give both a "fair" share (i.e., congruent with their internal standard of what constitutes appropriate pay for their level of inputs); however, when the total amount of reward exceeded substantially what was necessary to give themselves and the other equitable pay (i.e., establish own-other equity), they tended to give themselves more than 50%. The present study extended this research by examining the reward distribution behavior of both males and females under conditions in which the total amount of pay was either sufficient or oversufficient to establish own-other equity. Based upon the results of research which suggested that the equality norm is highly salient for females, it was predicted that females will divide rewards equally irrespective of the total amount available; on the other hand, males will divide rewards equally only when this behavior establishes own-other equity (i.e., when rewards are sufficient, but not oversufficient).

## Method

The methodology of this research was very similar to that used in past studies of reward distribution behavior (Lane & Messe', 1971, 1972). Subjects were 72 male and 78 female undergraduates at Michigan State University--volunteers who were randomly selected from over 500 respondents

to an advertisement in the school newspaper that solicited persons who were interested in participating in "motivational research" for pay. They were examined in groups of 8-12 persons of the same sex.

First, for about 55 minutes, all subjects in a group completed an open-ended questionnaire on industrial relations. Then, they were each handed two envelopes--one marked "my pay", the other "his" (or "her") pay--and an amount of money in bills and coins. In the sufficient pay condition, this amount was $4, in the oversufficient condition, it was $8.[2] Subjects were told to distribute the money as they wished and then record what they did on a sheet of paper that was to be folded and mixed in with the responses of the other subjects.

Before subjects allocated the rewards, the experimenter explained that all of them were to divide the money, but the choices of only half the group--to be determined at random--would be used. Thus, each subject could be choosing for himself and one other (whose specific identity would remain unknown since the "his (her) pay" envelopes were to be distributed at random).

After the subjects distributed the reward into the two envelopes and recorded their responses, the experimenter announced out loud whose allocations were chosen to be used. The experimenter then collected the "my pay" and the "his(her) pay" envelopes from the nonchosen subjects. Then the experimenter collected the "his(her) pay" envelopes from the choosers and let them keep the "my pay" envelopes. The "his pay" envelopes were then distributed at random to the nonchosen subjects.

## Results

The percent of the total reward available that each subject reported allocating to him (her)self was the dependent measure.[3] These data were examined through a 2 (sex of allocator) x 2 (sufficiency of pay) unweighted means ANOVA.

The sex of allocator x sufficiency of pay interaction was expected to be significant, since it was predicted that sufficiency of pay would affect the behavior of males but not females. Results of the ANOVA supported the prediction, since this effect was found to be significant ($F = 6.82$, $df = 1/146$, $p < .05$).[4] Inspection of all means, presented in Table 1, suggests--and tests of simple effects confirmed--that the results were in the predicted direction. Males allocated a greater percentage of

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Insert Table 1 about here

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the total reward to themselves when this amount was oversufficient than when it was sufficient ($F = 5.98$, $p < .05$); females, on the other hand, tended to divide the reward equally, irrespective of the total amount that was available ($F = 1.24$).

## Discussion

The results supported the hypothesis that the norm of equality is more salient for females than males, while males seem concerned more about own-other equity. As in Lane and Messe' (1972), males tended to give themselves more than an equal share when the total amount available exceeded what was needed to give both parties a "fair" share (as defined by the internal standard of $2/hr.). Females divided the money equally, no matter the total, and thus, appeared to be guided strongly by considerations of equality.

It could be argued that results were due mainly to a sex difference in concern with comparison (as opposed to own-other) equity; that is, it could be that females disregarded the internal standard and only compared their inputs with the coworker's, while males attended to both comparison

and own-other equity. While possible, this explanation seems unlikely, given the findings of Leventhal and Lane (1970) and Messe' and Lichtman (1972). As noted above, these studies found that female subjects violated comparison equity and allocated only 50% to themselves when they had superior inputs. This finding and those of other studies (e.g., Benton, 1971) suggest that females, as hypothesized, are more concerned than males with equality and this greater concern affected their behavior in the present research.

It is interesting to note that in both the present research and the past studies cited above, females never behaved in ways that were to their advantage economically, and this is especially clear when their responses are compared to those of males. Obviously, the present research provided only indirect evidence in support of Mednick and Tangri's (1972) contention that females do not feel that their own work inputs merit commensurate monetary rewards. However, this and other research does indicate that this speculation may be valid and it certainly merits further study. Moreover, these studies do provide direct evidence for Mednick and Tangri's more general premise that, at present, conditions, attitudes and behaviors exist that work against economic parity for the sexes, and without economic parity, true equality is impossible.

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Footnotes

[1]This research was supported by the Cooperation/Conflict Research Group of the Computer Institute for Social Science Research, Michigan State University (USAFOSR Grant # 44620-69-C-0114).

[2]Lane and Messe' (1972) report that undergraduates perceive that $2/hr. is equitable pay for this type of work. Thus, a total reward of $8 is a gross overpayment.

[3]It was possible that subjects' self-reports differed from their actual reward distribution behavior. However, an examination of the pay envelopes of the subjects whose distributions were not actually used, indicated that the self-reports always were accurate.

[4]The main effect for sex of subjects was also significant ($F = 9.30$), but since this effect is qualified by the significant 2-way interaction is not discussed further.

Table 1

The Mean Percentage of Rewards

That Male and Female Subjects

Allocated to Themselves

| Sex of subjects | Total Reward | |
|---|---|---|
| | Sufficient ($4) | Oversufficient ($8) |
| Male | 55.0 | 60.7 |
| Female | 53.8 | 51.2 |